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ABSTRACT

This paper describes one teacher's experiences teaching English to Mexican university students at the Instituto Technologico y de Estudios Superiores de Mexico (ITESM), which is considered Mexico's top private university. The author taught two levels of English as a Second Language: English 2 and advanced English. The entire ITESM system used the same textbook, so there was consistency regardless of which campus students attended. The classes followed a format that included reading, listening to, repeating, and writing English. Students also wrote letters to students in a Spanish class at a U.S. university. During laboratory sessions, students played charades and picture acting games, and did scavenger hunts. English language movies were incorporated into all classes. Students viewed the movies then wrote reviews about them. They also learned English idioms. They were given 10 vocabulary words per week. Toward the end of the semester, students learned the words to American rock and roll songs. In the advanced class, discussion groups on a wide variety of topics were very successful. Students also gave speeches on topics of their choice. Grades were based on tests, homework, class participation, and speeches. (SM)

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Teaching English as a Second Language to Mexican University Students

The purpose of this paper is to describe methods, both successful and not, used to teach English to Mexican university students, specifically, those students at Insituto Tecnologico y de Estudios Superiores de Mexico (ITESM) - Campus Guaymas, Sonara. Upon investigation it was noted that very little has been aforeto published in the field of "teaching English as a second language in a foreign country" or "teaching English in an international university setting". From those articles published, I will point out that international education is deemed important in higher education (Brogan, 1990, Petracca, 1990); international experience is important for teachers (Tarrow & Sutter, 1994); and that because of our global society, international experience and teaching foreign language is important for those in the liberal arts as well as in business education (McKinney, 1987).

Historically, the officials at the ITESM have placed a premium on learning English. Because the value of knowing a second language, particularly English, os recognized by ITESM officials, at least four classes of English are required. With the passage of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), it is all the more advantageous to know English.

The Setting

ITESM is Mexico's top private university. The Institute is often likened to the U.S.'s MIT and is considered to be very prestigious. Only the best students are admitted to the Instituted, which dates back to 1943. Although it began in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, it is now a country-wide education system of 26 campuses and known as the ITESM System. The basic mission to the ITEMS is "to provide high quality undergraduate and graduate education" (ITESM,1992). Historically, students and professors alike at ITESM have been encouraged to pursue international experience. About half of the students at the Institute have had international education. Likewise, many of the professors have studied or taught outside Mexico.

ITESM, Campus Guaymas, undergraduate degrees in Biochemical Engineering, Food Processing Aquaculture. They also have an extensive graduate program offering masters degrees in conservation, ecology and management of natural resources, aquaculture and processing of marine products. It is located on the Gulf of California in Bachochibampo Bay, near the once-active shrimping city of 150,000 of Guaymas.

On a sabbatical leave, I taught English the fall semester in 1993. I am an associate professor in education and although I have a teaching certificate in Language Arts, do not teach English by trade.

The classes and students

I was assigned two levels of required English classes-English II and Advanced English as well as lab classes for both. In addition, I had a high school or "prepa" English class in which the mandate was to prepare the students for their TOEFEL exam. However, for this paper, I will limit my discussion to the university classes. I taught a total of about 50 students, with the largest class being the advanced English. Students came from all over Mexico. Most however, were from the immediate vicinity or central or southern Mexico.

After listening to the students speak English and giving them a pre-test, it was

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English-speaking country or for only a short amount of time and there were a couple of students who had been in the U.S. for a few years and will struggled with English. Their verbal capabilities varied much more than their written capabilities. Overall, the students' English skills were good, which speaks well of the ITESM system and Mexico's prepas.

Methods

The book and audio tapes for the English II class was "Spectrum IV, a Communicative Course in English" (Warshawsky). The entire ITESM system used the same textbook so that there was consistency, regardless of which of the 26 campuses students attended. I followed the format suggested by the teaching manual-that included reading, listening to, repeating and writing English.

An additional teaching method that seemed to work was writing letters to the Spanish class at Northeastern University. There was only time during the semester for one exchange of letter-writing, however, it proved to be motivational for the students. Hopefully, some of these contracts continued.

During the lab session we exercised more freedoms. The students enjoyed games of charades and draw-a-picture where one side would act out the phrase, title, word that the other group had. They were required to answer only in English. Another popular game played during the lab class was a scavenger hunt. Teams of students were given a list of items in English and had to bring them back.

Because of student requests,I incorporated movies into all classes. Borrowed movies without Spanish subtitles were shown during class-time. It usually took two classes to show one movie. After which the students were required to write a review. Students were also responsible for questions about the movie on a test. From the movie review method I was able to assess students' writing skills.

Another student request was to learn idioms. Using a borrowed book of American idioms (I do not have the title) I taught three idioms a week. Student were held responsible for these idioms on a test, also. Occasionally students would bring in slang terms or expressions and ask what they meant.

Students were also given 10 vocabulary words a week (a total of 40 for each test). I chose the words at the beginning, however, I found it better if they gave me a list of words (in Spanish) that they wanted translated in English. Even with an extensive Spanish/English dictionary, I was not always successful in the translation, but I still had enough words for the semester. Many of the words were trade words.

Towards the end of the semester, students brought a list of North American songs, mostly rock-and-roll, and wanted the words translated. So, I wrote down all the words in English to songs such as "Hotel California," by the Eagles; "Tears in Heaven," by Eric Clapton and took them to class. We listened to the songs while they had the English in front of them. Then students were required to write what they thought the song meant. This was one of the more popular exercises.

The system changed the Advanced English class every semester. The semester I was there, "Public Speaking" was the topic. The book used was by Dale, P. & Wolf, J.C., "Speech Communication for International Students," 1988. When I began the semester, I started lecturing from the book with a speech every Friday. At the students' suggestion, I began utilizing several methods such as group discussion. I began limiting my time lecturing to three or four days a month maximum.

In this advanced class, discussion groups of a wide variety were very successful. Group discussions about magazine articles that the students read in English was a common technique. I obtained U.S. magazines and passed them out to the students to read. Students read an article and report on it; then, other students joined in the discussion.

Other discussions centered around specific topics--many times involving the U.S. and international relations. From these kinds of discussions, I was able to ascertain a variety of viewpoints about U.S. and Mexican relations. At the time, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was being debated in the U.S. and before Congress for a vote. It was enlightening to hear the students' comments.

Of course, I employed types of speeches the text suggested: hobbies; debates; persuasive speeches; panel discussions; group discussions over specific topics; and impromptu speeches. I had a guest speaker, from the US., share his life's work. The students wrote a brief review of his speech class for which I gave them credit.

In the lab classes I also used music translations and movie reviews at the students's request. Tests were required by the system to be given once a month. However, homework, class participation and in the case of the speech class, speeches, were part of the grade.

The grades, however, were not necessarily representative of past experiences. Some of the students reported receiving higher grades in the past, but said that they had actually learned more English from me, a native-speaking teacher than from previous teachers.

In addition to classes, I had extensive interaction with students-lived in the female student apartments with my young sons. I had an "open-door" policy and had many students stop by and visit. Also, I attended events with the students both on and off campus. There was an U.S. retirement community close-by, however, I spent most of my time with students or in the Mexican community. I feel that this facilitated sharing and reciprocal understanding. Since my Spanish is passable, but limited, I sometimes needed help interpreting at my sons' school.

From many formal and informal discussions I found students very concerned about their country and U.S. relations. I learned much through my teaching exchange and would say that the exchange of knowledge that semester was bi-directional. Evaluations were very high and the administration made note of that fact to me. In retrospect, I would say that my teaching success was due to the fact that I was eager to help them learn; listened to them; interacted with them and most of all, learned to be more flexible.

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